

## Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, December 14, 1893, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Beinn Bhreagh, C. B. Dec. 14th, 1893. My dear little wife:

I'm afraid "my Journal" is not a success. I am afraid you did not find time to read all the stuff I wrote on the spur of the moment — and I am so full of "flying machine" that I haven't put pen to paper for anything else for a day or two.

I think I explained to you the construction of the new fan-winged machine — a sort of fan made of strips of tin. Having found that it seemed to propel my whirling-table well — I determined to try it in the air — with three wings.

Wings made of strips of tin  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch wide — angle at tip  $20^{\circ}$  — at centre  $90^{\circ}$ . When we came to try this with our rotator pulled by hand — it rose so readily that we could not get a good pull. I had to lengthen the pins of the rotator to make it stay on long enough to get any sort of a spin. Even then we could only pull half the length of leather cord. With this imperfect pull it went up about sixty feet.

Today we tried it again with a heavy ring of solid brass on the ends of the wings. Weight 460 grammes more than one pound. The addition of weight made it go higher. Don't know how high it went — certainly over 250 feet.

I tried it comparatively with "Our Best of Nov. 14th," which has until now remained our best. It was enormously superior to it. It went up higher and remained up much longer. There was a slight wind at the time — so both machines drifted somewhat with the wind. The old one fell at a distance of 42 paces — the new one at a distance of 102 paces — more than double the distance. 2 Height I should think about half as high again as the old

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one. Both about the same weight — more than one pound. Old machine 455 gme — new one 460. Very much pleased. Ellis hard at work on further modifications.

Mr. McCurdy returned last night — with ?usie. Have not seen her yet! She is coming to keep house for us. Mr. Martin has moved into the gardener's cottage — and John McAuley has gone to the Lodge.

Mr. Archibald of Cow Bay is on his way to Baddeck to look at Crescent Grove. Mrs. Kennan hopes he will buy it as she fears Mr. Everett thinks of buying it to put up a hotel there!

Cold snap — snow in great drifts — Bay frozen over. Beinn Bhreagh Hall warm and comfortable. Water troughs frozen up — but reservoir full and will last a month if necessary. Water in house O.K. Have been studying the freezing of water in the troughs. Most interesting — and think I can make them work yet. Mr. McInnis had led in two small springs as well as the large stream in the gully.

The small stream continues running in the bottom of the trough for about 200 yards in spite of the thick layer of ice and snow above it. The large stream frozen up entirely.

Think I see reason. Noticed that one of the sections of trough where the small stream runs — leaked very badly — water came out through the bottom in a considerable stream. The flow continues as far as that leak. The large stream overflowed the trough at one point — the trough is frozen solid below that point. The leak in 3 the bottom had kept up a flow at the bottom of the trough — and the surface froze over — so that water continues running in a pipe of ice. I have now reduced the flow from the voluminous spring sufficiently to prevent the overflow — and have bored a hole in the bottom of the trough a considerable distance down, out of which there comes a considerable discharge.

By letting the trough freeze over where the overflow occurred — I hope to find the water flowing in a pipe of ice as far as my leak. If O. K. tomorrow — will clear the trough for

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another hundred yards — and make another hole at the bottom to keep the flow there. After this stream has frozen over — will proceed in same way — section by section until the reservoir is reached.

Principle — avoid overflow — and keep a current running at bottom of trough — of course we will plug the holes as we proceed lower down. Trouble is, I think, that the troughs are not large enough for the flow of water we have.

I am very glad I am not in Washington at this time — for Christmas has been spoiled for me by the indiscriminate present-giving with which I am so little in sympathy. You don't do me justice however — in your letter from Gilsey House received this morning.

There is no one who enters more heartily into the spirit of Christmas — and of present-giving than I — in its proper place.

Indeed I rather think you have on former occasions blamed me for my extravagance in the purchase of presents for 4 children — My objections do not touch children. By all means make the children happy — and let us buy all the presents for them that we may desire.

I have nothing to say to that and am in full sympathy with you there.

Buy presents also for servants — that seems to me all right too. But surely even you admit that the indiscriminate giving of presents is overdone but you don't know at what point it should stop. I say let it stop with children — and servants. That is the place. It is a childish thing anyway — and when it is carried out with adults — as it is in America it not only becomes ridiculous — but hurtful.

I have so often in the past, been mortified by the receipt of valuable presents from friends — which I was too poor to be able to return — that I determined — when I should have funds of my own — that I would do my best both by precept and example — to put a stop to the custom of giving valuable presents to adults — by neither receiving nor giving

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them myself — at the same time showing my full sympathy, with the giving of presents to children. But the indiscriminate giving of presents has reacted upon the children — and the principle that teaches children to buy valuable presents for Tom, Dick and Harry, with other people's money — and then say that they have given these presents themselves — is morally harmful to the children themselves. I would buy presents for the children themselves — but not buy presents for the children to give to others under the false pretence that they are giving them.

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Such presents are meaningless unless the children really give them themselves — and how can children give presents of intrinsic value? They can not unless other people pay for them. And if other people pay for them — is it right and proper — is it even truthful to allow the children to say (falsely) that they gave them. There is something morally wrong about it. I believe that the presents given by children should really and honestly be given by them themselves.

They should therefore be of little intrinsic value — and should be paid for either with their really own money — or better still should be made by their own hands — and hearts. Presents of that sort are worth more than gold — but the presents that have no heart behind them — presents given only because they must be given because forsooth it is Christmas Day and etc., etc., — are of little value even if of gold. I want none of them.

Your loving husband, Alec.